

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Bon Secour

*National Wildlife Refuge*



*Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, the restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats with the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.*



*This blue goose, designed by Ding Darling, has become a symbol of the Refuge System.*

### **Preserving a Natural Heritage**

Established by Congress on June 9, 1980, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge encompasses within its boundaries some of Alabama's last remaining undisturbed coastal barrier habitat.

Located fifty miles due west of Pensacola, Florida, and fifty miles southeast of Mobile, Alabama, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge consists of over 6500 acres of coastal lands ranging from constantly changing beach dunes to rolling pine-oak woodlands. Management at Bon Secour is aimed at protecting and preserving these unique habitats and associated wildlife for generations to come. The refuge protects the well being of native plants and animals, serves as a living laboratory for students and scientists, and provides wildlife-oriented public recreation.

*Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit*



The name Bon Secour comes from the French meaning "safe harbor," very appropriate considering the sanctuary for native flora and fauna that the refuge provides. Bon Secour is indeed a natural oasis of wildlands in a sea of condominiums where wildlife can exist without harm.



### Habitat

By definition, habitat is an area where an animal or plant lives which provides food, water, shelter and space. Bon Secour owns or manages five miles of gulf beaches on the Fort Morgan Peninsula and more than a dozen miles of bayfront on other refuge units along Mobile Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway. Impressively pristine, the beaches along the Fort Morgan peninsula are often referred to as America's Riviera. Coastal Alabama is indeed a paradise not only for humans but for several endangered or threatened species as well.

### Endangered or Threatened Species on Bon Secour

Listed as endangered June 6, 1985, the Alabama beach mouse is associated with the sand dunes closest to the Gulf of Mexico which supports stands of sea oats, a principal food source for this small dune dweller. A small mouse with a buff colored patch on its back and snowy white underbelly, the Alabama beach mouse is nocturnal in nature, living and breeding in the foredunes, burrowing small tunnels in the sand to escape predators. Its existence has been threatened by man's steady development along the natural beaches where it makes its home.

### The Alabama Beach Mouse



Alabama Cooperative  
Fish and Wildlife  
Research Unit

### The Loggerhead Sea Turtle

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In over 200 million years these creatures have changed very little. The loss of nesting beaches due to

coastal development and predation have been major factors in the decline of these huge marine reptiles. In summer, tell-tale tracks on refuge beaches attest to nocturnal visits

of loggerheads which come ashore to lay eggs and then return secretively to the sea. Nesting occurs from May—September, peaking around mid-June.

### The Gopher Tortoise

Habitat loss and man's encroachment have threatened this reptile whose normal lifespan is 80-100 years. Although it is now illegal to kill one, people have been eating them for years. In the years of the great depression, they were known as Hoover's chickens. Gopher tortoises can be identified by a tan, brown or gray dome-shaped upper shell and flattened shovel-like forelimbs, which are well adapted for digging. Gopher tortoises are approximately 10-12 inches in length.

### The American Alligator

Found throughout the refuge, the American Alligator can be confused with the long, pointed-nosed crocodile which in the U.S. is found only in extreme south Florida. The alligator has a more rounded nose.

Most of Bon Secour's gators measure 6-12 feet, although the record in the U.S. is 19 feet 2 inches. On land, the sleepy looking reptile is able to produce speeds of up to 20 miles per hour. When in the water, they often resemble a log, so look for just its nose, eyes and back above the surface.

Coastal Photography Club







### Hurricane Frederic

At nightfall on September 12, 1979, the devastating 150 mph winds of Hurricane Frederic struck the Alabama Gulf Coast doing untold damage to property, wildlife and the natural barrier island itself. Miraculously, not a single human life was lost due to this storm. Born off the coast of Africa days earlier, Frederic raged on for twelve hours, twisting and snapping pine trees like toothpicks. Live oaks fared better in strong winds. Summer homes were ripped apart and scattered along the peninsula like leaves in the wind. Such debris is still evident in many places over the refuge today, mute testimony to the impermanence of man's creations in an area subject to the awesome fury of hurricanes.

### Things You Can Do

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is open year-round during daylight hours for hiking, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, nature study and sun bathing. Take your binoculars and camera, walk the trails and look closely. This will help you to see animals that blend in well with their surroundings.



### Foot trails

The Pine Beach Trail is open seven days a week from dawn to dusk. The trail is four miles round trip. Next to Gator Lake is a kiosk where visitors are welcome to stop for a picnic lunch.

The Jeff Friend Trail is the newest of our trails and features a wheel chair accessible one mile loop. Spectacular views of the lagoon can be had on this trail.

During the hot, humid, summer months, be prepared for mosquitos, sand gnats and other biting insects; bring along insect repellant.



*Fishing—fresh water*  
Forty-acre Gator Lake is open for fishing year-round. Largemouth bass, catfish, bluegill are the most commonly caught species. Canoe and small boats are allowed as are electric trolling motors—gasoline motors are prohibited. Boats must be portaged 8/10 of a mile from the parking lot at the trail head or one can fish from the bank. A valid Alabama freshwater fishing license is required.

*Fishing—salt water*  
Anglers can take advantage of the beach access to try their hand at

surf fishing. Or take a short stroll down the Jeff Friend Trail to fish Little Lagoon. A valid Alabama saltwater fishing license is required.

### Hiking

The entire refuge is open to hiking and nature study although travel off the designated trail may require boots or waders.

## Prohibited Activities

No weapons allowed.

Collection of artifacts, animals, sea  
oats, and other plants is prohibited.

Pets must be on a leash at all times.

Please put litter in its place.

Camping and open fires are  
prohibited on all refuge units.

Vehicles, including ATV's, prohibited  
off state and county roads.

## Wildlife Calendar

### *Spring/Summer*

Migratory songbirds herald spring's  
arrival, most arriving in mid-April.

Birdwatchers from near and far come  
to view the  
marvelous array  
of diverse  
species.

Wading bird  
nesting takes  
two months to  
complete, usually  
starting in May  
but sometimes  
starting as late  
as early July.  
Nearby great  
blue heron and  
cattle egret  
rookeries  
(nature's  
nursery) are  
very active with  
newborn chicks.

By mid-April,  
the ospreys  
arrive back at  
Bon Secour and

immediately set out refurbishing  
their nests. Watch for aerial  
courtship displays of these beautiful  
birds. During the summer, ospreys  
feed nestlings.



Charlie Heidecker

Endangered/threatened sea turtle  
nesting occurs. The entire process  
from nest digging to egg hatching  
takes approximately 60 days  
beginning in May and lasting through  
September.

### *Fall/Winter*

Fall bird migration begins in August  
and peaks around mid-October.  
During this time peregrines and other  
raptors can be seen soaring overhead.

Monarch butterfly migration. In mid-  
October hundreds can be seen along  
Pine Beach Trail drawing nutrients  
from milkweed and other plants.

In September and October fall  
wildflowers light up the peninsula  
with a spectacular array of colors.  
Two of the most popular are the  
scarlet colored red basil and the  
feathery goldenrod with its sweet  
anise-like aroma.

In addition to the migrants, brown  
pelicans, ospreys and a wide variety  
of wading birds can be seen year-  
round. Other wildlife you may see are  
bobcats, squirrels, marsh and  
cottontail rabbits, opossum, raccoons,  
and nine-banded armadillos.



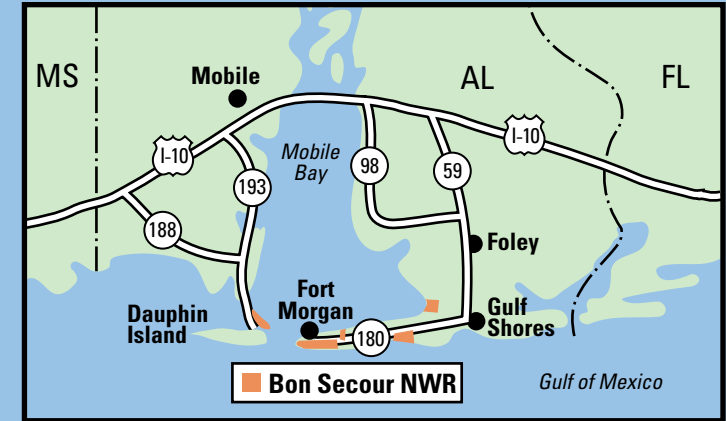
Coastal Photography Club



# Bon Secour

## National Wildlife Refuge

- Refuge boundary
- Foot trail
- Fresh water fishing
- Salt water fishing
- Public beach access
- Visitor center
- Hiking
- Parking



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Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

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